

Sen. Cooper Opposes Reopening Investigation Of JFK Assassination

There is no point in reopening the investigation of the slaying of President Kennedy, says U.S. Sen. John Sherman Cooper, because the Warren Commission Report was "valid" and "correct."

Cooper, however, acknowledged in an interview that the commission's investigation of the assassination was not as thorough as it could have been.

The Kentucky Republican was a member of the commission during its 10-month study of the Nov. 22, 1963, shooting of President Kennedy.

The voluminous report of the commission has come under increasing criticism in recent months, and several national publications have called for reopening of the investigation.

Cooper said a new investigation would not be "helpful." He emphasized that he feels the evidence is conclusive that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in murdering Kennedy and Dallas policeman J. D. Tippit, and in wounding Texas Gov. John Connally.

X-Rays Not Reviewed

Nonetheless, Cooper acknowledged, the commission's investigation perhaps was not as exhaustive as it could have been and at least one piece of "significant" evidence had not been called for by the commission.

The evidence he referred to was a set of X rays and color photographs of the President's body taken during an autopsy a few hours after the assassination.

Failure of the commission to call for this information "could be a valid criticism," Cooper said. "It would have been much better to see them, so this doubt would not have been raised."

The senator said he personally is becoming "more and more convinced" that the President and Gov. Connally were struck by the same bullet.

The Warren Report, however, indicates that Cooper first tended to believe Kennedy and Connally were hit by separate bullets.

This was so, Cooper said, because "Gov. Connally was very strong in his testimony" and "because of the governor's later statements that he did not think the bullet that had pierced President Kennedy's neck had entered his (Connally's) back."

"But even then, we—Rep. Boggs, Sen. Russell and I—did agree that there was persuasive evidence that they had been struck by the same bullet," he added.

Hale Boggs, Richard Russell and Cooper were three of the seven commissioners who tended to agree with the Texas governor's remarks.

The so-called "two-bullet theory" has been one of the key points made by critics in refuting the Warren Commission's conclusions about the presidential assassin.

If Kennedy and Connally were hit by separate bullets the possibility of two gunmen, instead of Oswald acting alone, was greatly increased, they have said.

No Conspiracy Found

A basis for this contention was that films indicated Kennedy's and Connally's reactions to being wounded were 1.8 seconds apart, while it took a minimum of 2.3 seconds to operate the bolt on the rifle the commission said was used in the assassination.

Cooper said in the interview that the commission had found no evidence of a conspiracy against the President—and if there was no conspiracy, the two men almost certainly had to have been hit by the same bullet.

But even if they were not, Cooper said, he "will not say categorically," as did commission lawyer Norman Redlich, of New York City, that there must have been a second assassin.

"Of course," he said, "the only alternative (to a second assassin) is that he (Oswald) could pull off a second shot in that length of time. But maybe he could pull it off."

Report witnesses testified that the fir-

ing of two shots with a bolt-action rifle that quickly is an impossibility.

Cooper noted that another criticism of the commission's report has been that it did not call all eyewitnesses to the assassination to testify.

Criticizes Lawyer's Book

Their testimony, he added, would not be as important as the X rays and color photographs of the President's body.

Cooper said he felt the commission pursued every lead which "we thought had substance." He said the FBI conducted 25,000 interviews and the Secret Service 1,500 more.

The senator said he felt criticism made by New York lawyer Mark Lane, who said in his book, "Rush to Judgment," that nearly 200 eyewitnesses were not interviewed, was not justified.

Cooper said Lane testified "at length" before the commission and "he could not give us any one thing that could bear out the contentions he made (that Oswald was not the assassin)."

Cooper said the book, "Inquest," written by Edward Jay Epstein, contains passages that are "inaccurate reporting" and "absolutely untrue."

No Preconceived Notions

Epstein questioned the haste and alleged lack of thoroughness of the commission inquiry and hinted that the commission's major interest was in protecting public faith in the government rather than in finding the truth.

Epstein quoted Cooper as saying that "one of the commission's most important purposes was 'to lift the cloud of doubts that had been cast over American institutions.'"

"That isn't true," Cooper said. "I never said anything like that. That is absolutely untrue. . . . We had no preconceived notions, no purpose except to secure all of the facts and on the basis of those facts reach our conclusions."

Cooper also denied that the White House or anyone else had influenced or hampered the commission investigation. He also said the commission did not accept all FBI reports as conclusive, as some critics contend. "We checked on our own," he said.

The senator said that, generally speaking, commission detractors have been guilty of taking remarks and events out of context to challenge the report.

"Of course there are vague and uncertain matters connected with it," Cooper said. "If there weren't, then there would have been no reason for the investigation."

"But in the context of all of the evidence we resolved the questions. When we finished, there was no doubt in any of the commissioners' minds that Oswald fired the shots and that he acted alone."

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